

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NIC-01 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10 SAJ-01 /079 W

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R 140845Z MAR 75

FM USLO PEKING

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3381

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 438

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, BE, VN

SUBJECT: BELGIAN AMBASSADOR GROOTHAERT'S IMPRESSIONS OF HANOI

1. BELGIAN AMBASSADOR TO PRC GROOTHAERT, ALSO ACCREDITED TO NORTH VIETNAM, VISITED HANOI IN EARLY FEBRUARY TO PRESENT HIS CREDENTIALS. FOLLOWING ARE HIS IMPRESSIONS OF VISIT:

2. BELGIAN-DRV RELATIONS. GROOTHAERT'S AGREEMENT HAD BEEN HELD UP BY HANOI FOR OVER A YEAR EVIDENTLY IN HOPES OF PRESSURING BELGIUM INTO

"DOING SOMETHING GOOD" FOR PRGSVN. HOWEVER, NORTH VIETNAMESE EVIDENTLY

DECIDED ON POLICY FAIRLY RECENTLY WHICH, ACCORDING TO GROOTHAERT, EMPHASIZED ESTABLISHMENT OF GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, BOTH EAST AND WEST, AND PLAYED DOWN PRG ASPECT OTHER THAN TO TAKE LINE THAT PARIS AGREEMENT ACKNOWLEDGED EXISTENCE OF TWO ADMINISTRATIONS AND TWO ARMED FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND EITHER BOTH ADMINISTRATIONS SHOULD BE REPRESENTED IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS OR NEITHER. NORTH VIETNAMESE STRESSED THAT NO PROBLEMS EXISTED BETWEEN

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HANOI AND BELGIUM, AND THAT RELATIONS WERE GOOD. GROOTHAERT WAS VERY

WELL RECEIVED.

3. DRV FOREIGN RELATIONS. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH DRV FOREIGN MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG, HEAD OF EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN MINISTRY MAI VAN BO, AND PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TRINH, GROOETHAERT FOUND NORTH VIETNAMESE VERY RELAXED ABOUT CURRENT WORLD SITUATION. ONLY TRINH MANIFESTED ANY PARTICULAR ANTI-US LINE, AND BOTH PHAM AND MAI SEEMED TO AVOID POLEMICS TO STRESS HANOI'S NEED FOR (AND INDEED PREOCCUPATION WITH) RECONSTRUCTION. THERE WAS FULL CONFIDENCE THAT AS FAR AS NORTH WAS CONCERNED, WAR HAD ENDED. ALL DENIED NORTH VIETNAM HAD ANY FORCES IN THE SOUTH, AND CLAIM WAS MADE THAT COMMUNIST TROOPS THERE WERE SOLELY OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE ORIGIN. IT WAS ACKNOWLEDGED THOUGH, THAT HELP WAS BEING GIVEN TO THE SOUTH, AND TASKS OF RECONSTRUCTION AND SUPPORTING THE SOUTH WERE IN FACT ALL PART OF ONE PACKAGE. RECONSTRUCTION AID WAS BEING SOLICITED FROM WHEREVER IT COULD BE OBTAINED.

4. REGARDING SITUATION IN THE SOUTH, BOTH PHAM AND MAI RULED OUT ANY FURTHER TALKS WITH THIEU, WHO WAS CONSIDERED "HOPELESS". HOWEVER, THEY WERE FULLY CONFIDENT HE WOULD BE REMOVED FROM OFFICE SOON AS RESULT OF ACTION BY US CONGRESS IN REFUSING TO SUSTAIN FURTHER AID EXPENDITURES IN SOUTH VIETNAM. ONCE THIEU WAS GONE, NVN LEADERS ANTICIPATED HIS REPLACEMENT BY ANOTHER LEADER FROM HIS "FACTION", NAMELY, THE GVN, FOLLOWING WHICH TRIPARTITE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION COULD BE SET UP IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARIS AGREEMENT WITH REPS FROM PRGSVN, NEUTRALISTS AND GVN. PHAM AND MAI SAW REUNIFICATION AS INEVITABLE, CLAIMING THAT ALL VIETNAMESE SUPPORTED THIS GOAL, BUT ONLY AFTER A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME HAD PASSED.

5. IN DRV RELATIONS WITH PRC AND USSR, GROOETHAERT FOUND SOVIET PRESENCE IN HANOI FAR MORE NOTICEABLE THAN THAT OF CHINESE. HE WAS FREQUENTLY MISTAKEN FOR SOVIET BY HANOI PEOPLE, AND NOTICED MANY RUSSIANS PRESENT IN THE CITY. SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN SHIPS WERE ALSO SEEN IN SOME NUMBERS IN HAIPHONG. NEVERTHELESS, GROOETHAERT HAD FEELING THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE WERE NOT PARTICULARLY PRO

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SOVIET. HE HEARD FROM POLISH AND YUGOSLAV AMBASSADORS THAT MOVEMENTS OF SOVIET PERSONNEL WERE SUBJECT TO SOME RESTRICTIONS AND THAT BASIC DRV/USSR RELATIONSHIP WAS NOT TOO WARM. AS FOR CHINESE, GROOETHAERT OBSERVED THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE IN THEIR REMARKS MADE MANY DIGS AT CHINESE WHICH, WHILE NOT MUCH IN THEMSELVES, "WERE LONGER THAN THE GREAT WALL" WHEN PUT TOGETHER. FOR EXAMPLE, GROOETHAERT ASKED NORTH VIETNAMESE IF THEY,

LIKE THE CHINESE, WERE CARRYING OUT CAMPGIAN TO CRITICIZE CONFUCIUS
AND RECEIVED REPLY THAT "WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR SUCH THINGS."

6. GENERAL. GROOTHAERT FOUND LIFE IN HANOI QUITE RELAXED, CERTAINLY
BY PEKING STANDARDS. NONE OF THE TIGHT DISCIPLINE OF PEOPLE WHICH
EXISTS IN PEKING WAS PERCEPTIBLE IN HANOI (ALTHOUGH
GROOTHAERT ADMITTEDLY FELT SOME CONTROLS MUST HAVE BEEN THERE).
HE NOTED WOMEN DRESSED IN AODAIS AND WEARING MAKEUP, AND
COMMENTED THAT TET CELEBRATION IN HANOI, PREPARATIONS FOR WHICH
WERE UNDERWAY DURING HIS VISIT, APPEARED TO BE ON MUCH MORE
LAVISH SCALE THAN CELEBRATION OF SPRING FESTIVAL IN PEKING.
THERE WAS A LARGE AND FLOURISHING FREE MARKET FOR VEGETABLES,
FISH, FRUIT, MEAT, ETC. SHIPMENT OF 12 JAPANESE MOTORBIKES HAD
BEEN QUICKLY SNAPPED UP. PRICES WERE HIGH, BUT PEOPLE COULD
EVIDENTLY AFFORD THESE PRICES BECAUSE MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN
EACH FAMILY WAS EMPLOYED. IN KEEPING WITH SENSE THAT WAR WAS
OVER AS FAR AS NVN CONCERNED, AIRRAID SHELTERS IN HANOI WERE
BEING FILLED IN WITH DIRT AND SOME LARGER ONES WERE BEING TORN
DOWN. CONTRARY TO GROOTHAERT'S EXPECTATIONS, THOSE PARTS OF
HANOI HE VISITED, APART FROM BOMBED-OUT HOSPITAL, SHOWED NO SIGNS
OF WAR DAMAGE. HAIPHONG, IN GREAT CONTRAST, STILL SHOWED
EXTENSIVE DAMAGE AND SCARS OF WAR. THERE WAS LITTLE ANTI-US PROPAGAND
A
VISIBLE EXCEPT FOR PIECES OF B-52 IN PUBLIC PARK. MAIN EXHIBIT
IN MILITARY MUSEUM WAS DIORAMA OF BATTLE OF DIENBIENPHU,
ALTHOUGH BACK ROOMS CONTAINED DISPLAYS OF PARTS FROM ONE SHOTDOWN
B-52 AND PHOTOS OF "WAR OF DESTRUCTION."

7. US-FRENCH RELATIONS. GROOTHAERT SAID THAT FRENCH IN HANOI WERE
CONVINCED THAT US BOMBING OF FRENCH EMBASSY HAD BEEN A DELIBERATE
ACT. FRENCH AMBASSADOR, DESCRIBED BY GROOTHAERT AS A "THOUGHTFUL MAN"

,
HAD REACHED THIS CONCLUSION AND AFP REP IN HANOI, WHO HAD BEEN PLAYIN
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TENNIS AT EMBASSY WHEN ATTACK OCCURRED, CLAIMED THAT AIRCRAFT INVOLVE
D
HAD SINGLED EMBASSY OUT FOR ATTACK. GROOTHAERT MENTIONED INTER ALIA
THAT MANAC'H FORMER FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN PEKING WHO HAD RUSHED TO
HANOI AFTER INCIDENT HAD OCCURRED, ALSO BELIEVED THAT ATTACK HAD
BEEN DELIBERATE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CREDENTIALS PRESENTATION, VISITS, AMBASSADORS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PEKING00438
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750091-0242
From: PEKING
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750350/aaaabsie.tel
Line Count: 162
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BELGIAN AMBASSADOR GROOHTHAERT'S IMPRESSIONS OF HANOI
TAGS: PFOR, CH, BE, VN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006